

# Time Lag and Sequencing Dilemmas of Postconflict Reconstruction

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The United States appears to be moving to a whole-of-government approach to address the challenges of failed states and postconflict reconstruction without a full understanding of its implications. The most often observed weakness in U.S. foreign policy architecture is the imbalance among the three elements of national power: defense, diplomacy, and development (the three Ds). Some critics argue that the Pentagon dominates field operations and the interagency process not only because of its massive staff, enormous budget, and highly developed planning and operations culture but also because of the relative weakness of diplomacy and development. Linking development and diplomacy, however, is a mistake. While they do share the common problem of being weak compared to the defense establishment, beyond this they are unlike in every important way.

Both defense and diplomacy share a common short-term time horizon inconsistent with that of development, which requires a longer timeframe for planning and success. The demands made by the U.S. defense and diplomatic establishments of development agencies (usually the U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID] in the case of the U.S. Government) during and following conflicts contradict good development practice and the dynamics of collapsed states. Defense and diplomacy demand more immediate results than what are achievable given the nature of social change and institution-building in the postconflict setting. When the results produced by aid programs are not what the other agencies of the U.S. Government expect, aid or development is said to have “failed” when in fact the demands were inconsistent with historical and developmental reality.

The discontinuities among the three Ds most often involve time.<sup>1</sup> Successful development in fragile or failed states—Paul Collier’s “bottom billion”—simply takes much longer to achieve than defense planners and diplomats can accept. In addition, postconflict states suffer from time

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lags between the development of rural versus urban areas, of one region versus another, and in the proper timing and sequencing of various sector programs. The three largest current U.S. aid programs—in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan—are used as case studies in this analysis.

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#### Time Lags

Some of the most serious discontinuities in reconstruction and peacekeeping operations revolve around the issue of time lags: between public expectations and actual results people can see on the ground, between the local demand of people to own and control reconstruction efforts in their country and the institutional incapacity of postconflict countries to manage their own affairs, and in the disparity among various regions of a country in the pace of reconstruction. States coming out of conflict face dilemmas between the demand of peacekeeping troops for reconstruction programs to pacify unstable areas so they do not sustain high casualty rates and the ability of bilateral and multilateral aid agencies to deliver these programs operationally. Perhaps the greatest of all time lags is the 15- to 20-year period necessary (but not sufficient) to build stable democratic political institutions and functioning national and local governments.<sup>2</sup> Finally, some development programs are more important than others earlier in the process of reconstruction.

In the case of Afghanistan, the first element of this time lag manifestation is the rapid modernization of society in urban areas through the people's contact with the outside

world, increases in discretionary family income in urban centers creating a consumer economy for modern products, and the presence of television programming, which has created a window into the global economy and modern world. It is the physical images of people on television, particularly of unrelated young men and women appearing together in public, of immodestly dressed women, and of modern consumer culture, that are undoubtedly disturbing to conservative Afghan families. The one major private television station in Kabul is now under intense pressure from conservative forces to curtail its programming, compromise the integrity of its news coverage, and limit the window it provides for Afghans to see the outside world.

Modernization, particularly when it comes as rapidly as it has in parts of Afghanistan, can be a disruptive force in traditional societies. In addition, educated parents in urban areas are insisting their daughters attend school, even college. While primary schools are increasingly available in rural areas for both boys and girls and considerable progress has been made in increasing girls' attendance, high schools and colleges are not as available in rural areas for girls. Traditional Afghan society is giving way to modernization in Kabul, but this is not the case in rural areas. This is creating serious social tensions between rural and urban areas because of the cultural time lag caused by the disparity in the rates of modernization. These tensions between modernity and tradition are fueling Taliban resurgence in rural areas.

A second manifestation of the time lag problem is the differential rates of development in various regions of the country. The Afghan government and the international community assisting the country in the reconstruction process have struggled with the need to balance urban and rural development. If there is one



**Road construction project improved travel network between Alam and Samrah, Iraq, June 2009**

Afghan government refrain heard over and over again, it is to put resources into rural areas. That has certainly happened in the case of the U.S. reconstruction program, which has built or rebuilt over 1,000 schools and health clinics, the bulk of them in rural areas, and produced 63 million textbooks for all schools in all subjects (with the exception of religion). One complicating factor in this allocation of U.S. funds to rural areas has been the requirement that much of this money must be spent on the U.S. counternarcotics program to reduce poppy production, which, while being a laudable goal, is a narrowly focused strategy. Moreover, it has diverted funding from broader objectives. There has been heavy political pressure to invest development funds in Afghanistan in the center of the Taliban insurgency for understandable reasons—the Pashtun area in the east and southeast part of the country—with the consequence that the other regions have suffered from proportionately reduced aid programming, angering the Hazara, Uzbek, and Tajik populations, among others. Since these ethnic groups have been traditional opponents of the Taliban, it is unwise to alienate them by limiting their development and rewarding the principal ethnic adversary of efforts to modernize and rebuild Afghanistan.

The economic power of international aid programs in postconflict settings goes well beyond the programs themselves, as the subsidiary infusion of money into the economy through the presence of aid workers and headquarters operations in the capital city and other urban areas acts as a stimulus to growth. This economic infusion includes the rental of elite-owned local housing for international aid and military contractor staffs (often at inflated rates given the limited supply); purchase, repair, and fueling of aid vehicles; purchase of supplies and equipment; subcontracting of aid work to local companies; and purchase of consumer goods on the local urban markets. The increased sale of Afghan

rugs alone to the massive inflow of international aid workers must be enormous. While I worked in the nongovernmental organization (NGO) community in the 1990s, I informally calculated the average NGO staffing pattern in postconflict settings in Africa and found that for every one expatriate brought into the country to manage programs, between 15 and 20 national staff

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are hired from the local economy. Most of this secondary spending takes place in urban areas, particularly in the capital cities such as Kabul, Baghdad, and Juba (Southern Sudan), causing rapid urban economic growth over a short time that, despite every effort to the contrary, does not extend to rural areas at the same rate. One USAID-commissioned study of Afghanistan in early 2002 described *four* Afghan economies as the aid effort was poised to expand massively:<sup>3</sup>

- ❖ the war economy composed of, among other things, local weapons markets whose customers were warlords and their militias
- ❖ the poppy economy encouraged and facilitated by the Taliban in the 1990s as a way of destroying Western society
- ❖ the international aid economy just described
- ❖ the legitimate but anemic economy of agricultural products and transportation services (Afghanistan is Central Asia's indispensable regional transport hub).

Many Afghans living in rural areas see the international aid program based in urban areas

as part and parcel of the donor government effort to destroy the poppy economy, which is the one source of increased income they survive on.

The third manifestation of the time lag problem is the high expectation for a peace dividend by the devastated and impoverished population and the long time required to build public and private institutions to manage public services, enforce some semblance of public order through the establishment of the rule of law, and stabilize the political system sufficiently to get the legitimate economy moving to produce wealth and jobs. This has been a problem in all three countries (as it is in all fragile and failed states, and indeed it is the definition of state fragility). The local institutions needed to meet these public expectations simply do not exist or are fragile; they take years to develop, evolve, and mature and get woven into the culture and structure of the societies they serve. While outside aid organizations can support and facilitate the development of local institutions, or at least not act as an impediment to their development, they cannot transplant them mechanically into a society that does not provide some preexisting fertile indigenous ground for their development in the form of local leadership, local support, and a culture and system of values conducive to institutional development. More importantly, these institutions take decades to develop. Since the time required to build institutions is at the heart of the time lag problem, we should briefly examine the matter.

### Institution-building

Institutions are sets of formal and informal organizations based on common norms, business systems, and structures that carry out certain repetitive functions in the social, political, and economic orders making up a nation-state.

Profoundly affected by the values of the culture that the institutions develop in, these norms, systems, and structures determine how strong or weak, and how sustainable, the institutions may become over time. Strong and sustainable institutions provide a breakwater to destructive social upheaval, stabilize society during times of crisis, provide an orderly means for the peaceful resolution of internal conflict and of decision-making, and carry out critical functions needed for a society to function.<sup>4</sup>

At their core, development and reconstruction are about institution-building—both public and private. Military planners and, to a lesser degree, diplomats too often take reconstruction as a literal concept: the physical rebuilding of infrastructure that, while a part of reconstruction, is not at the heart of it. Even reconstructed infrastructure is unsustainable without key institutions protecting the investment through operations and maintenance capacity in ministries of public works or transportation, and protecting infrastructure from insurgent attacks through institutions of internal security. The presence of a wide variety of robust institutions is what distinguishes highly developed, stable states from fragile and failed states.

The absorptive capacity problems in post-conflict states force international donor aid agencies to go through their own implementation mechanisms or multilateral channels such as the international development banks or United Nations (UN) agencies because they reduce the risk of accountability and performance problems. They generally do this well under difficult circumstances, but at a high overhead cost. They fund private for-profit businesses and international NGOs to implement programs and provide public services usually in cooperation with the weak ministry structures, but using their internal business systems and implementation structures

outside the regular bureaucratic national systems. The less developed the country at the beginning of the reconstruction process and the smaller the pool of educated people, the more acute this problem will be. Southern Sudan and Afghanistan, for example, faced a serious human capital deficit at the beginning of their reconstruction process because of a small pool of individuals available for hire. Paul Collier points out that civil wars tend to drive out the educated elites early in the conflicts because they are the most mobile individuals, with the consequence that the human capital available for reconstruction is modest. While much critical analysis has been done of these parallel international aid implementation mechanisms, none of these critiques has proposed a viable alternative to the parallel “international government” constructed by aid agencies in postconflict settings to get work done—work demanded by diplomats and military officers.<sup>5</sup>

Even the formal institutions of a private market economy, such as the banking system, are frequently underdeveloped or nonexistent.

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For instance, when the U.S. Government and the newly formed Afghan government arrived in Kabul in early 2002, there were no commercial banks in Afghanistan, nor were there any banks in Southern Sudan in 2005 when the North South Peace Agreement was signed. This was also true of Somalia when coalition forces entered Mogadishu in late 1992.

Thus, there is a gap between the demands of the public and the capacity of either nascent



**Afghan Interior Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar  
has been an effective administrator**

local institutions or newly arriving international institutions to deliver on these demands. If the time lag is not reduced and the gap between expectation and delivery is not bridged relatively quickly, the credibility of the central government suffers, sometimes through political upheaval. If this outside reconstruction infrastructure is not put in place and instead aid agencies attempt to force funding through weak local institutions or national governments as they form and develop, this time lag grows even more severe with even greater risk of political explosion. Over time, local political leaders grow more vocal in demanding that they manage their own reconstruction even if the institutions of government remain underdeveloped. If, because of this pressure, the transfer of managerial responsibility to indigenous government takes place too rapidly, accountability will deteriorate and performance will lag, with both having political implications. The international aid program then may witness the revolution of rising reconstruction expectations among the population and the

unraveling of the political arrangements that brought peace.

World Bank studies have shown that as many as 50 percent of all political settlements after a violent conflict fail at the implementation stage. While most of these failures are either a function of the collapse of fragile political settlements or failures to put in place security sector measures to control street crime, militias, and warlords, time lag can play a role in this collapse. Conversely, an accelerated and robust reconstruction effort can shore up a failing political settlement and an unstable security situation.<sup>6</sup>

### Some Remedies

In the cases of Afghanistan and Southern Sudan, several remedies were undertaken. The most successful of these in Afghanistan was initiated by then–Minister of Rural Reconstruction (and now Minister of the Interior) Mohammad Hanif Atmar, one of the most able of the Afghan cabinet ministers, who knew from his long experience in the NGO world that performance and accountability issues were of central importance to the donors. Yet he wanted Afghans to control the reconstruction agenda at the village level, so he designed an innovative solution to the problem. He set up village reconstruction committees with men and women elected to decide on small village projects. He contracted with a respected American development company to serve as the fiduciary and implementing agent to coordinate with communities to get the work done. Many donors put money into the program, which performed exceptionally well, had high levels of accountability, suffered little if any corruption, moved quickly once decisions were made locally, and ensured local control, ownership, and visibility. The Atmar

innovation is a case study in a local solution to this recurrent problem, though it requires strong and capable ministry leadership to make it work—and that is often *not* present. Atmar is an exceptional (and rare) administrator. This is why he has held three cabinet posts in the past few years—whenever a ministry is in trouble, President Hamid Karzai moves him to fix the problem.

In Southern Sudan, European bilateral aid agencies in 2005 created the Joint Donor Trust Fund to be managed by the World Bank to administer their development program for them. Europeans signed agreements with the new government of Southern Sudan to require that outside aid be matched with oil revenues. The fund, while well intended, was delayed by several years because of disputes between the World Bank and UN over authority and responsibility. Attempts by the Europeans, World Bank, and UN to improve the performance of the Southern Sudanese government in administering public services by marrying aid money and oil revenues have failed as the Southern government simply has neither the capacity nor the will to develop the fund and to spend public revenue. The attention of Southern leaders has been on preparing to defend themselves from a potential attack from Khartoum when the mandated referendum on Southern independence takes place in 2011.

USAID, taking a different approach than the Europeans, used its new fragile states strategy to design the U.S. reconstruction effort in Southern Sudan. This strategy attempts to marry political analysis with reconstruction planning to minimize the destructive effect of time lags on the peace settlement. The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between the Southern Sudanese and Northern government is the cornerstone of the

peace, which allows the reconstruction effort to take place. If the CPA failed, USAID strategists reasoned, there would be no reconstruction effort as the parties were likely to return to war. Political analysis determined that three areas—Abyei, Nuba Mountains, and Upper Blue Nile—were the most sensitive politically and most likely to blow up. The United States designed its reconstruction effort to make visible improvements in people's lives through the provision of public services such as health clinics, schools, and water projects to reduce the

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likelihood of instability. Unfortunately, when the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar Bashir for war crimes in Darfur, the self-destructive reaction of the Sudanese government was to expel American (as well as French and British) contractors and NGOs, thus shutting down programs in these three critical areas and others in Sudan (such as Darfur).

### **Economic and Political Reform**

Another critical factor in making reconstruction efforts successful has been stimulating economic growth—creating jobs, reducing poverty, producing tax revenues for public services, and improving living standards. All development, postconflict or not, ultimately depends on whether sustained rates of economic growth can be achieved over time, producing the tax revenues needed to maintain competent institutions of governance, establish the rule of law,

build infrastructure, and sustain public services. More importantly, economic growth can create the jobs needed to absorb surplus labor that might otherwise be drawn into organized criminal activity or warlord militias. This is particularly true of unemployed young men who are the fodder for militias and criminal gangs. Research into the drivers of conflict indicate that the size of the age cohort of men between 15 and 30 years as a total proportion of the population of a country has a high correlation to the likelihood the society will experience violent conflict, particularly if the young men are unemployed or displaced from their traditional societal moorings.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of sustainable economic growth cannot be overestimated, and yet long-term growth in postconflict settings once again requires political will, the right policies, the willingness of political leaders to annoy powerful economic interests with monopolistic control over segments of the economy, and a much longer timeframe than military planners and diplomats can tolerate. This principle is qualified with the word *sustainable*. In virtually all postconflict capital cities, an artificial international assistance culture emerges that stimulates *unsustainable* growth. Once those aid dollars slow or decline, and eventually they always do, the boom from ancillary aid spending in the local economy collapses. Thus, we have a lag between the time that real economic growth occurs from private investment and economic reforms (and the short-term political instability these reforms may engender) and the immediate demand for new jobs and higher living standards.

In the case of Iraq, the time lag between the initiation of economic reforms by the interim governments (which would have eventually led to private investment and economic growth) and the actual creation of jobs on the

ground led USAID to initiate short-term public employment programs in 2003 and 2004—employing at their height 60,000 to 70,000 Iraqis as day laborers to clean up neighborhoods, repair sewer and water lines, and perform other small-scale public works projects. This was done through USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives within the Bureau of Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance. We know from careful statistical data kept by the U.S. military that violence in the areas where these jobs programs were undertaken was measurably lower than those where there were no programs. The problem is that there is a temporal limit on how many public sector jobs can be created effectively by local and international aid programs. But this was one way to stabilize conditions in fragile areas during the early stages of reconstruction before the benefits of private sector economic growth could take place. Aid agencies have had much greater success in stimulating economic growth and job creation through commercial loan guarantee programs administered by the newly established banking system than by public works programs run by aid agencies or local governments.

### **Sequencing Programs and Operations**

Jack Goldstone has provided important analysis of peacekeeping operations on the problem of *simultaneity* (that is, the demand that all programs be initiated simultaneously even when this is operationally difficult and perhaps counterproductive).<sup>8</sup> He suggests some useful guidance on how operational and programmatic tasks should be sequenced, particularly focusing on the security sector. Goldstone argues that the first priority should be what is called security sector reform to deal with warlords and militias that threaten fragile political systems. In addition, development professionals argue it

is essential that security sector reform includes dealing with street crime through the establishment of functioning police departments, a body of criminal law, a court system, a cadre of trained criminal prosecutors, and a prison system to incarcerate those convicted of crimes. In civil wars, the line between warlord militias and street criminals is ambiguous. Though Goldstone's broad analysis is plausible, its weakness is in the time lag between the initiation of these security programs and actual improvements in security on the ground.

As a USAID official, I managed the U.S. humanitarian aid effort in Somalia in 1991 and 1992, and the first priority (after we tried to reduce the death rates from starvation and disease from the famine) was the creation of a legal system to arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate the criminals and brigands causing chaos. Because neither the United States nor the UN had the capacity to put in place a robust program to accomplish these security sector objectives in some organized way, the program was

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never successfully implemented, but a great deal of planning and analysis was done in 1992 on the matter.

Goldstone's argument can be taken further by examining another sector that could be ramped up for action with much more rapid, early results—rural roads. We have learned from reconstruction in Afghanistan and Southern Sudan the importance of rebuilding the road system before nearly any other intervention. Because we attempted in 2002

to reconstruct everything simultaneously in Afghanistan, we may have retarded the reconstruction effort since roads and transportation infrastructure affect most other programs so directly. A photograph taken of one of the USAID convoys carrying bricks to a remote area of Afghanistan to build a school illustrates this point well. The truck was consumed by a mud hole that had once been a road, and neither the truck nor bricks on it were recoverable even after the rainy season. This scene has repeated itself across the country if in less dramatic ways, increasing the cost and time to construct schools, health clinics, court houses, and municipal buildings. We should have reconstructed the roads first and then followed with the other social welfare and governance programs. This would have reduced the cost and time needed to build the schools and clinics.

Indeed, USAID used this operational strategy very successfully in the communist insurgency in Northern Thailand in the 1970s. Perhaps the greatest impediment to an integrated strategy in the case of Afghanistan has been its weak national government, internal infighting between ministries, and poor planning capacity. In Thailand in the 1970s, the national government was institutionally strong with functional ministries, which made planning and executing a counterinsurgency strategy much easier than in Afghanistan.

Road reconstruction programs in Afghanistan had three other salutary consequences. First, they reduced the isolation of rural areas and thus the attraction of the insurgency. U.S. military officers stated that wherever rural roads were constructed or reconstructed, the influence of the insurgency in Afghanistan declined. Moreover, as soon as roads are open, commerce increases, markets flourish, food prices

drop as supply increases, and job creation is stimulated. Family income also grows as farmers produce agricultural surpluses, with inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, and tools.

Second, road programs in the reconstruction of Southern Sudan are having a significant impact on economic growth and the development of a nascent commercial sector. Within a year after the reconstruction of the road by USAID from Uganda to Yei, the capital of Western Equatoria Province, the number of small businesses increased from 200 to 1,200. In addition to commercial traffic, a twice-weekly private bus service was initiated between Kampala and Yei, dramatically reducing the isolation of the province after two decades of civil conflict.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, U.S. military commanders have asserted that the roads program in Afghanistan improved the ability of coalition forces to enforce the peace and counter the insurgency because more troops can be moved more quickly. This analysis must be tempered in the case of the USAID undertaking to rebuild the southern half of the ring road from Kabul to Kandahar and then to Heart. The Taliban insurgents have blown up the newly installed culverts that drain water away from the highway so it will be gradually destroyed by water. Brigands, perhaps associated with the insurgency, have made the highway so dangerous to travel that trucking traffic has had to be seriously curtailed. Once again, these problems can only be resolved through Afghan institutions.

While education is a popular program for its own intrinsic value, new evidence from studies in the poorest countries indicates that there is a direct correlation between school attendance by young men and criminal violence: the higher the rates of attendance, the lower the

level of crime. Thus, we may infer that rapidly raising school enrollment following a conflict is one way of improving security.<sup>10</sup>

Sequencing is not only a critical factor in reconstruction; in its military operational manifestation, it can also have profound effects on emergency humanitarian programs. During the Somalia intervention in December 1992, Fred Cuny, a legendary international disaster response expert who was later murdered in Chechnya, warned against the movement

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of U.S. troops into Somalia to one location. However much that may have made logistical and operational sense to the U.S. military, it was unintentionally counterproductive from a developmental perspective because it acted as a magnet for poor, hungry, and vulnerable villagers who saw the U.S. military representing food and protection from the violence of the warlords. Entire populations left their villages and moved toward this one base. General Muhammad Farrah Aideed, who later became the most disruptive of the warlords and who refused to negotiate a political settlement with other clan and factional leaders, was the principal beneficiary of this population movement because he sent his operatives into the feeding centers to recruit young men into his militia. Aideed's recruitment effort was facilitated by the collapse of traditional authority structures in villages. Cuny had proposed instead that international coalition military units arrive simultaneously at all of the dozen cities that the allied forces eventually sent troops to, thus reducing the powerful magnetic effect of

General Aideed's area to hungry villagers. This was a vivid example of the time lag problem in humanitarian operations and the rule of unintended consequences.<sup>11</sup>

We have also learned important lessons about sequencing in the timing of the return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes to coincide with the agricultural cycle, particularly for sedentary agriculturalists in rural areas. This has been a persistent problem in many emergencies such as Somalia (1993–1994), Sudan (2005–2007), and Afghanistan (2002–2004). If the movement of these populations is out of sequence with the agricultural cycle (that is, if they arrive too late to plant the next crop), they become dependent on external humanitarian assistance for a year longer. Since it is frequently difficult for aid agencies to serve people widely dispersed in rural areas, particularly areas that may remain insecure, having people return home under these circumstances can cause serious nutritional problems, encourage conflict between populations trying to survive until the next crop, and increase the risk that people may move again to other locations in search of food.

### Discontinuities

Historically, reconstruction programs following conflicts or natural disasters face two recurrent problems. First, while many countries make pledges of financial support against comprehensive reconstruction plans developed by international institutions—such as the World Bank and UN agencies with support of donor governments—some countries never fulfill their pledges, others count the same pledge several times to inflate their contributions, and still others spend the money over much longer periods than the pledge covers.

Second, in many countries, public-through-private contributions and their

government's foreign aid give large amounts of money to the visible early emergency humanitarian phase of a crisis response, when the real need is for funding for reconstruction and longer term development. Perhaps the best recent example was the massive sum raised in 2005

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for tsunami relief in Aceh, Indonesia. Even if all the funding was spent on reconstruction, the total amount raised was grossly in excess of what was needed given the number of people affected and the real cost of recovery. The tsunami is admittedly an extreme example of overfunding (albeit for a worthy cause) driven by sustained international media coverage.

Third, the international institutional arrangements for raising funds for postdisaster and post-conflict reconstruction have tended to encourage exaggerated public expectations of a peace dividend that will transform their lives overnight. The system used by the international community (historically encouraged by the United States) has relied on international pledging conferences to raise money. The problem with them is that they usually end with announcements of large donor pledges that create high expectations by the people in the countries to get the assistance for a rapid peace dividend, when in fact the disbursement and implementation problems ensure they will not see any broad improvements in their lives for some time.

These problems have led to chronic spending gaps, particularly in longer term

reconstruction efforts. These weaknesses in the international aid system are not unknown, and they remain unresolved; the organizational and political pressures that have caused them have not changed and are not likely to change any time soon. To a great degree, the organizational arrangements of the response structure—both bilateral and multilateral—have perpetuated this system, since they raise money for their particular mandates and not others. One reform that would alleviate some of the stress on the financing system would be to designate the burst of early funding as no-year money, so early emergency funds could be spent over many years on rehabilitation and reconstruction. Some of the emergency offices of aid agencies are now making rehabilitation and reconstruction grants and contracts using their emergency humanitarian funding accounts. This is particularly true in the case of USAID, where statutory changes were made by Congress during the 1990s. These humanitarian accounts are politically popular, widely supported in Congress across all administrations, and have never sustained significant budget cuts the way longer term development accounts have. Thus, one answer to this budgeting problem is to expand the definition of emergency aid and how it may be used, as well as which agencies may do reconstruction programming. NGOs have begun putting caveats in their fundraising letters to private donors that they may use some of the funding for reconstruction rather than simply humanitarian response, which increases the flexibility of the use of these funds and makes responses more effective.

### **Observations**

Time lags in postconflict settings may seriously disrupt the effectiveness of reconstruction

programs, and thus policymakers, program managers, and strategists should pay much closer attention to the timing and sequencing of these programs to address the challenges presented. Time lags are common features of most postconflict settings, but that does not mean the solution to these problems can be summarized in a simple formula or that successes in addressing them are easily transferred from one postconflict setting to another. Some lessons and remedies are transferrable, but others are not: reconstruction planning should be driven by the local context, not by an assembly line approach. One programmatic size (or approach) does not fit all situations. All reconstruction, like all politics, is ultimately local.

As a general proposition—consistent with local conditions—planners should consider overcompensating in budgeting, planning, operations, and programming for time lags rather than treating them as an isolated problem. Practically speaking, this means that in countries where the bulk of the population lives in rural areas and obtains its livelihood from agriculture, planners should consider putting disproportionate aid funding in rural areas not only because they do not benefit from the subsidiary aid spending that takes place in urban areas but also because dissatisfaction there can often fuel insurgencies.

The whole-of-government approach to reconstruction based on the three-D formulation often involves trying to accommodate inherently contradictory objectives. While more planning and information-sharing by elements of the three Ds can certainly help make the choices clearer, this analysis cannot resolve the unresolvable or rationalize inherently contradictory objectives. Calls for greater coordination as a solution to these problems ignore the essential conflict among the three

Ds in time, sequencing, and the different political and operational pressures they are under. The bureaucratic weakness of the development function in the U.S. Government has meant operationally that it will lose bureaucratic and policy battles, not because its perspective is less legitimate than those of diplomats and military officers, but because it is not at the table or its positions contradict those of its State Department superiors.

Unless policymakers seek out development expertise, the short planning requirements of American diplomacy and military operations will overwhelm the long-term development requirements to create a sustainable peace. Policymakers should make extra efforts, given the bureaucratic weakness of the development function, to get the input of experienced development professionals into key decisions. It is development professionals who best understand these time lags and sequencing challenges because they deal with them in every development setting, including those *not* involving postconflict situations.

Development and postconflict reconstruction require planners and strategists with experience and expertise in these disciplines, and USAID is the historical repository of this knowledge. Its problem right now is that its career staff has been decimated by 25 years of effective reductions in its operational budget, which pays for personnel and training. While Congress appears to be correcting this weakness, it will be some years before the damage is repaired. In the meantime, calling retired USAID officers back to service can bring this expertise to the planners' table to bridge the gap between development theory and practice, and the diplomatic and military requirements they are expected to serve. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I have taken the broad notion of time lags from James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock's celebrated essay (first published in 1958) on the subject in their *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), though their use of the term is not directly related to international development.

<sup>2</sup> The notion of a 15- to 20-year time horizon for a democracy to begin to take root is based on common practice among development agencies in regard to one critical indicator of democratization: successive free and fair elections and orderly succession of governments in which there is a change of party at least twice.

<sup>3</sup> The study was conducted by Sue Lautze of the Feinstein Famine Center at Tufts University. It was based on 1,200 random interviews in provinces taken in the first half of 2002. See *Food Insecurity in Afghanistan 1999–2002*, May 2002, available at <<http://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/display/FIC/Food+Insecurity+in+Afghanistan+1999-2002>>.

<sup>4</sup> While the creation of public and private institutions as the central purpose of development programs is a historical axiom of international development theory, Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast's *Violence and Social Order: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1–27, presents an excellent new framework for understanding why and how institutions are what distinguish wealthy and democratic developed societies from societies that tend to be undemocratic, unstable, and poor.

<sup>5</sup> See Andrew S. Natsios, "The Aid Wars," *American Interest* 4 (September–October 2008).

<sup>6</sup> See Paul Collier et al., *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2003), 83.

<sup>7</sup> See Henrik Urdal, *The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950–2000* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2004); and Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Who Fights: The Determinants of Participation in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2008), 436–455.

<sup>8</sup> Jack A. Goldstone, "The Simultaneity Problem in Stabilization/Reconstruction Operations," *International Peace Operations Association Quarterly* (January 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Data taken from interviews with Development Alternatives, Inc., project management staff in 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Urdal.

<sup>11</sup> I have written a fuller account of these problems in Somalia in "Humanitarian Relief Interventions in Somalia: The Economics of Chaos," *International Peacekeeping* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1996).